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A DROID™ ADVENTURE

By Ellen Weiss
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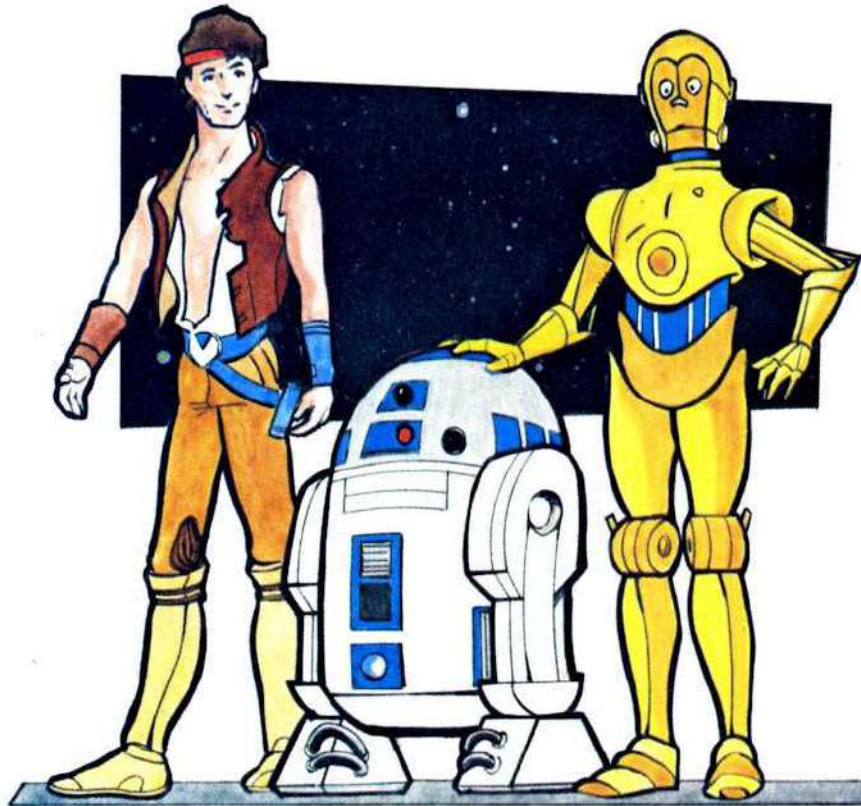




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By Ellen Weiss
Illustrated by Carter Concepts, Inc.
Based on a story by Peter Sauder



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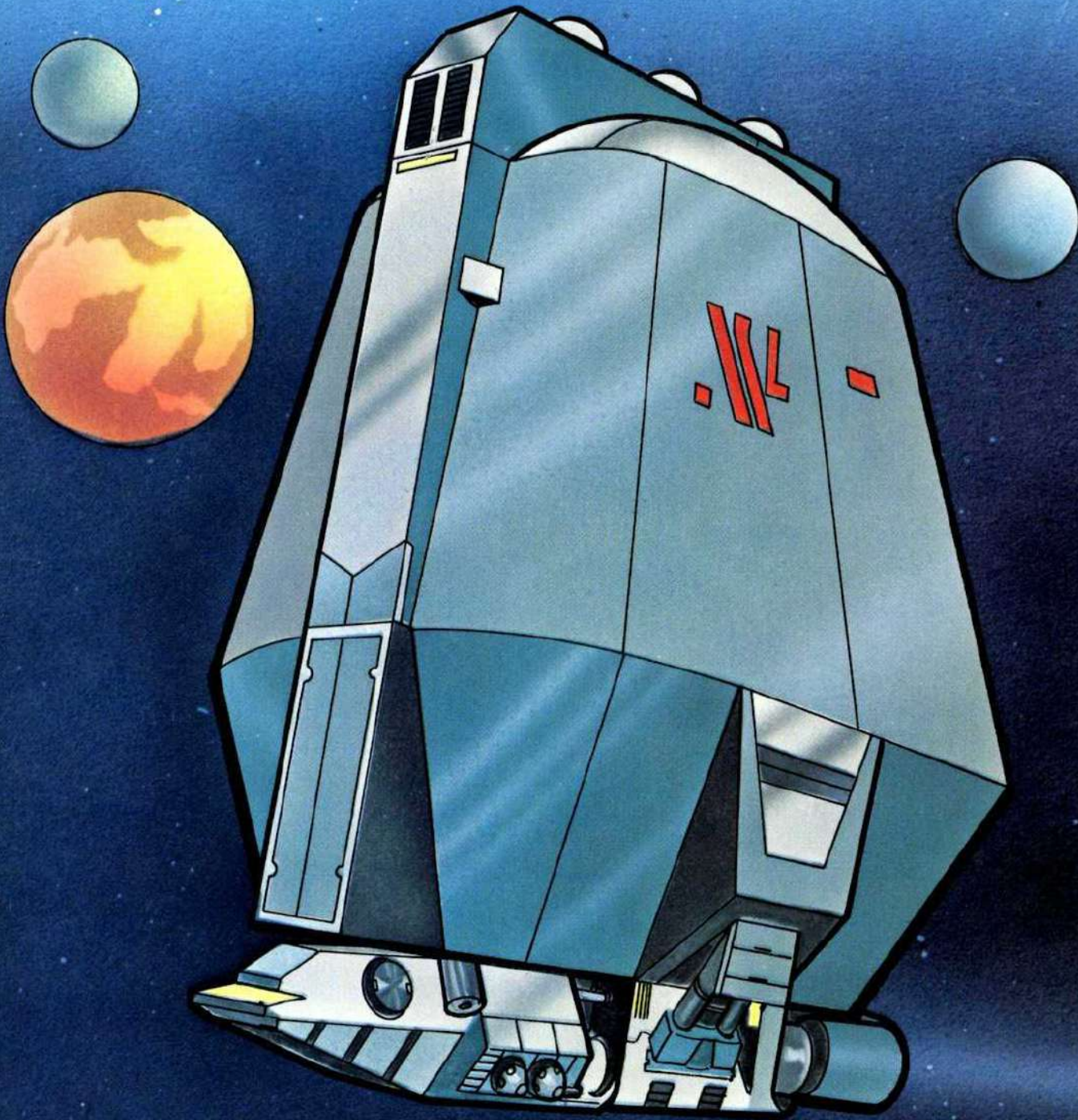
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A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, a gigantic ship moved slowly through deepest space. The ship was a fuel transporter, and it was heading toward the peaceful planet of Tammuz-An.

Aboard the ship were the two droid friends, C-3PO and R2-D2. They were traveling with their young mistress, Jessica Meade. Jann Tosh, their master, was not aboard. He was trailing them in his A-wing fighter, ready to protect them in case they ran into trouble.



Suddenly the ship was rocked by a blaster shot. Two pirate TIE fighters were approaching fast. Between them was a huge, sleek ship that looked like a killer shark. All three bore the same insignia on their wings: the dread pirate symbol of the wampa skull.

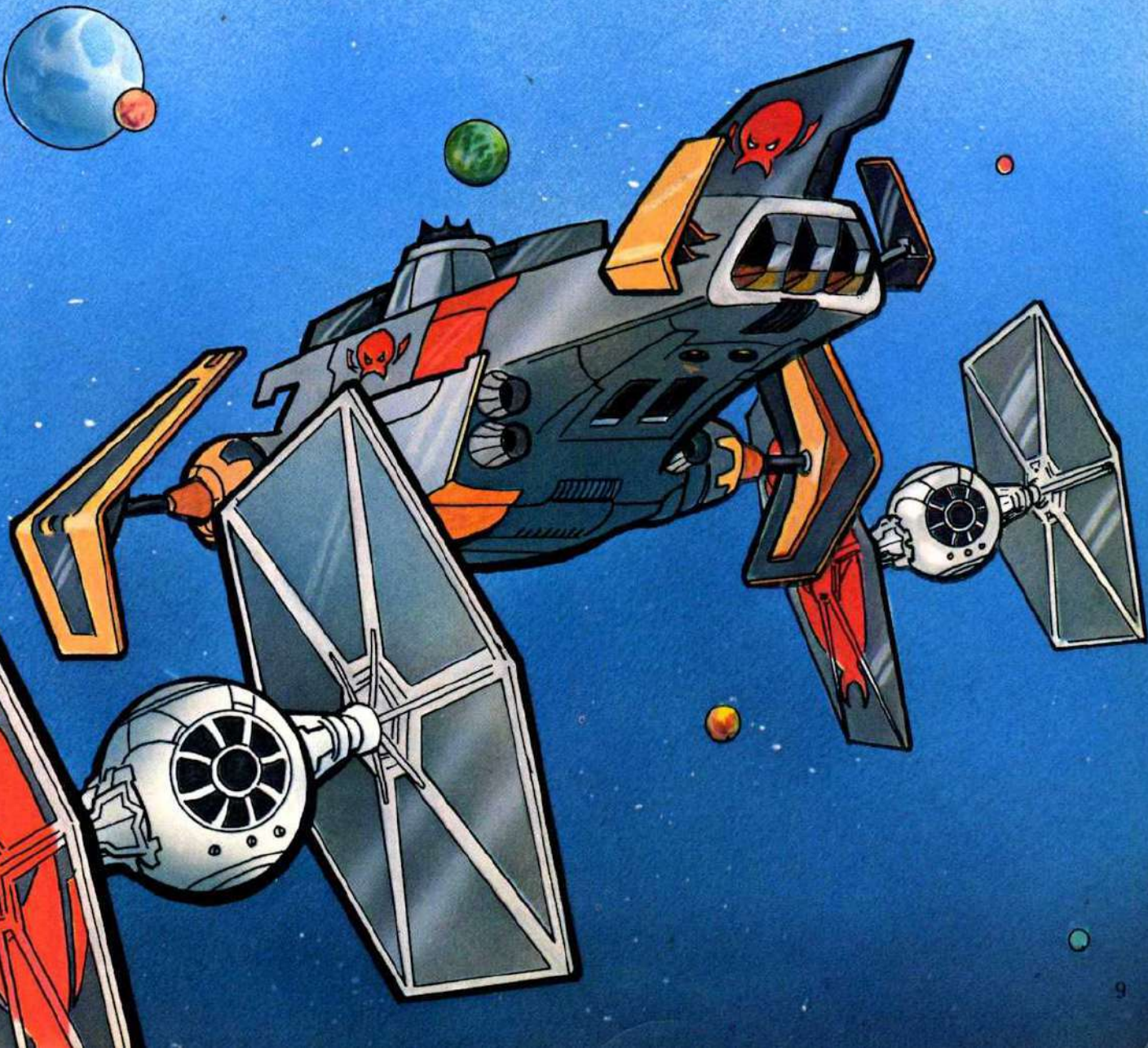
"See that big one?" said Jess. "That's the *Dianoga*. It belongs to Kybo Ren."

"Kybo Ren?" said Threepio. "The infamous pirate captain? We're doomed!"

"Don't worry, Threepio," said Jess. "They want us in one piece. They think we have lots of fuel to steal."

More shots flew toward Jess's transporter, and now she spoke urgently into her communicator. "Jann, we've got company! We need you—*fast*!"

Jann's voice crackled through the speaker. "I'm on my way!"



A lone speck appeared in the distance. In a few seconds Jann's A-wing fighter came zooming in toward the pirate fighters, guns blazing. But Jann was too late. The terrible *Dianoga* had already moved into position underneath the control room of the decoy transporter. Huge metal talons unfolded upward, grabbing the transporter firmly. An explosion rocked Jess's control room, and the floor began to glow.

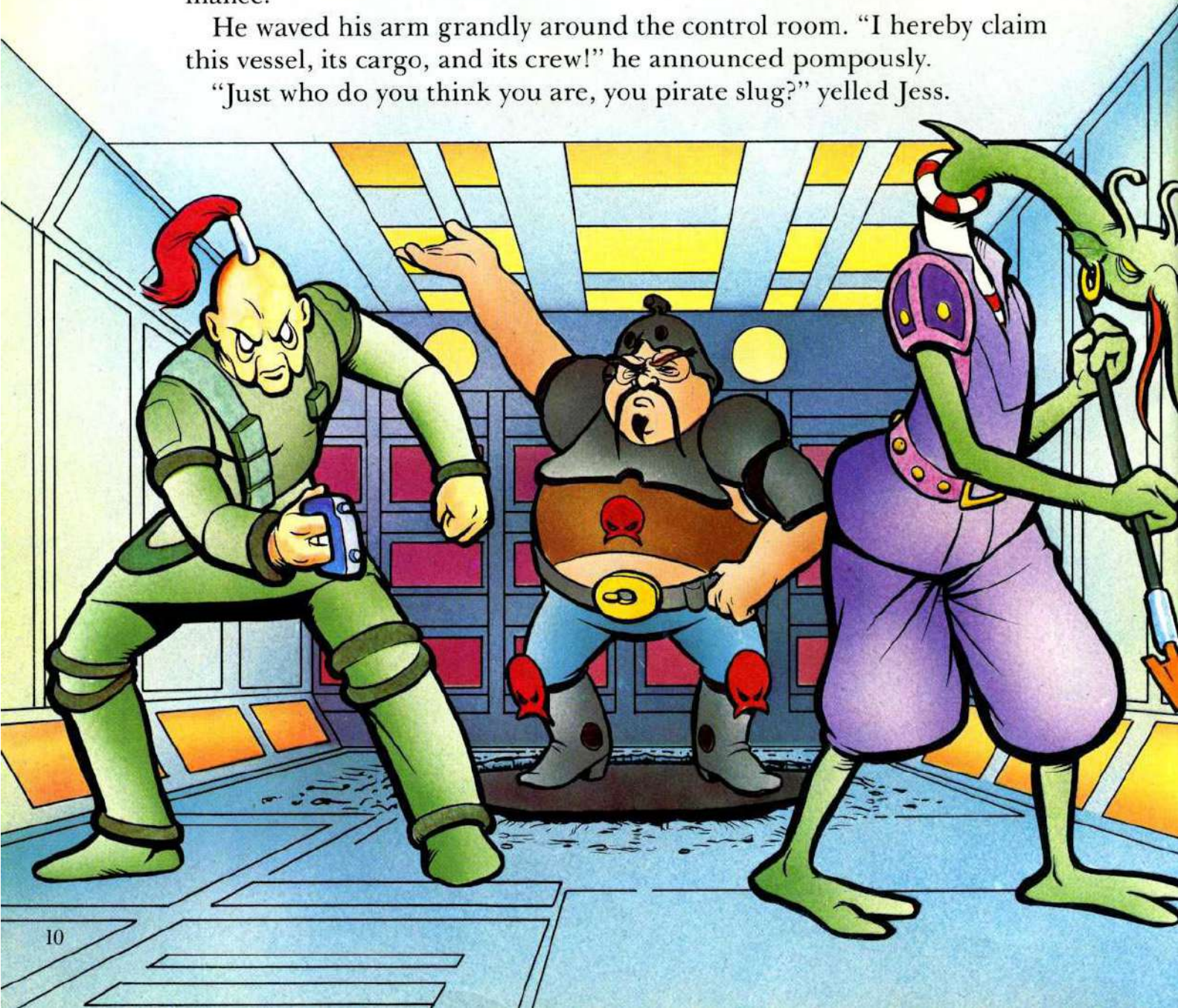
"Oh, no!" cried Threepio in panic. "They're *boarding!*"

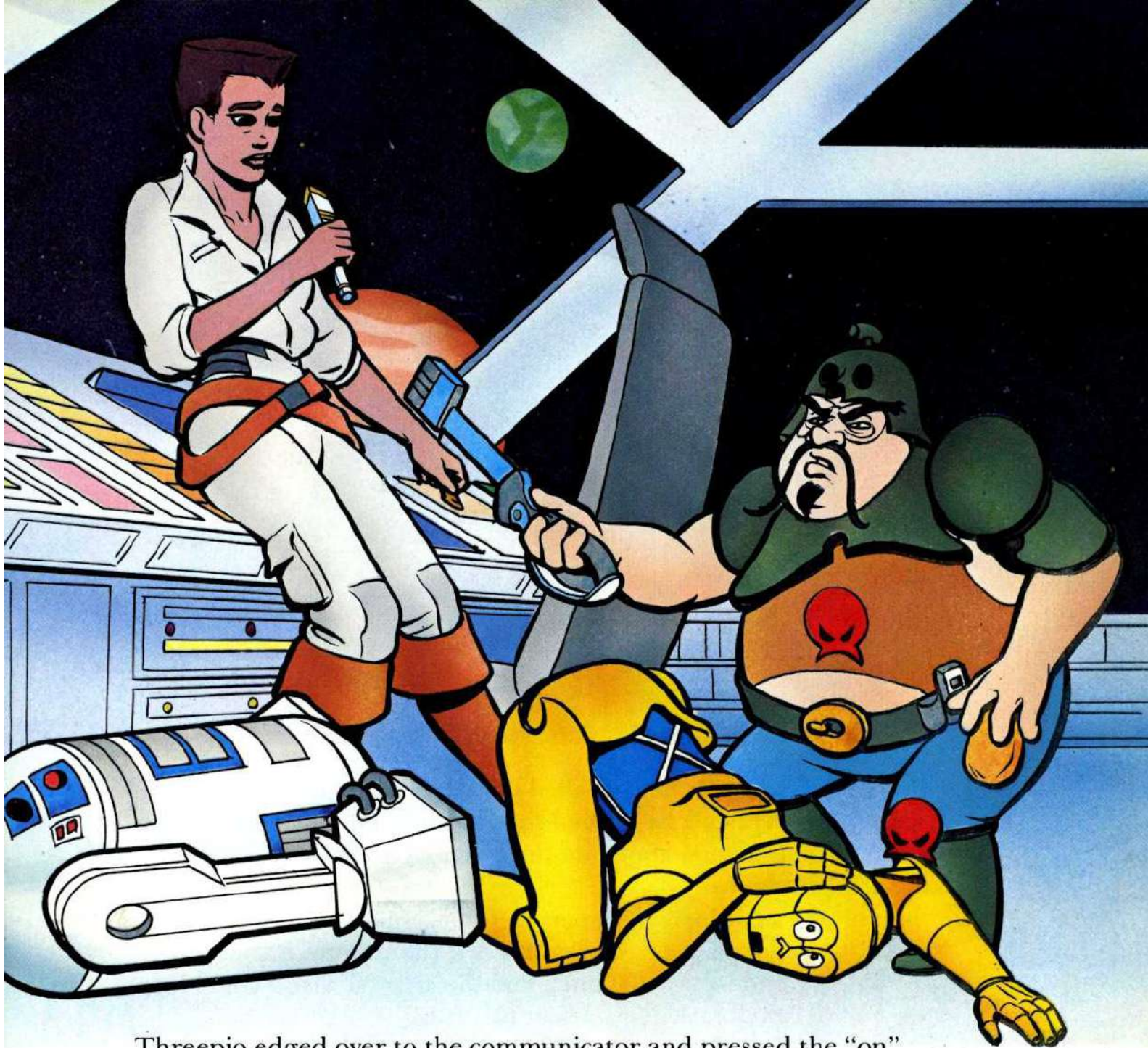
As they all looked down in horror, the floor began to dissolve away. Through the large hole that appeared, two bizarre-looking alien pirates leaped into the control room. Right behind them came Kybo Ren.

A short, heavy man with a long mustache and a goatee, Kybo looked harmless enough—except for his eyes. They were tiny, and bright with malice.

He waved his arm grandly around the control room. "I hereby claim this vessel, its cargo, and its crew!" he announced pompously.

"Just who do you think you are, you pirate slug?" yelled Jess.





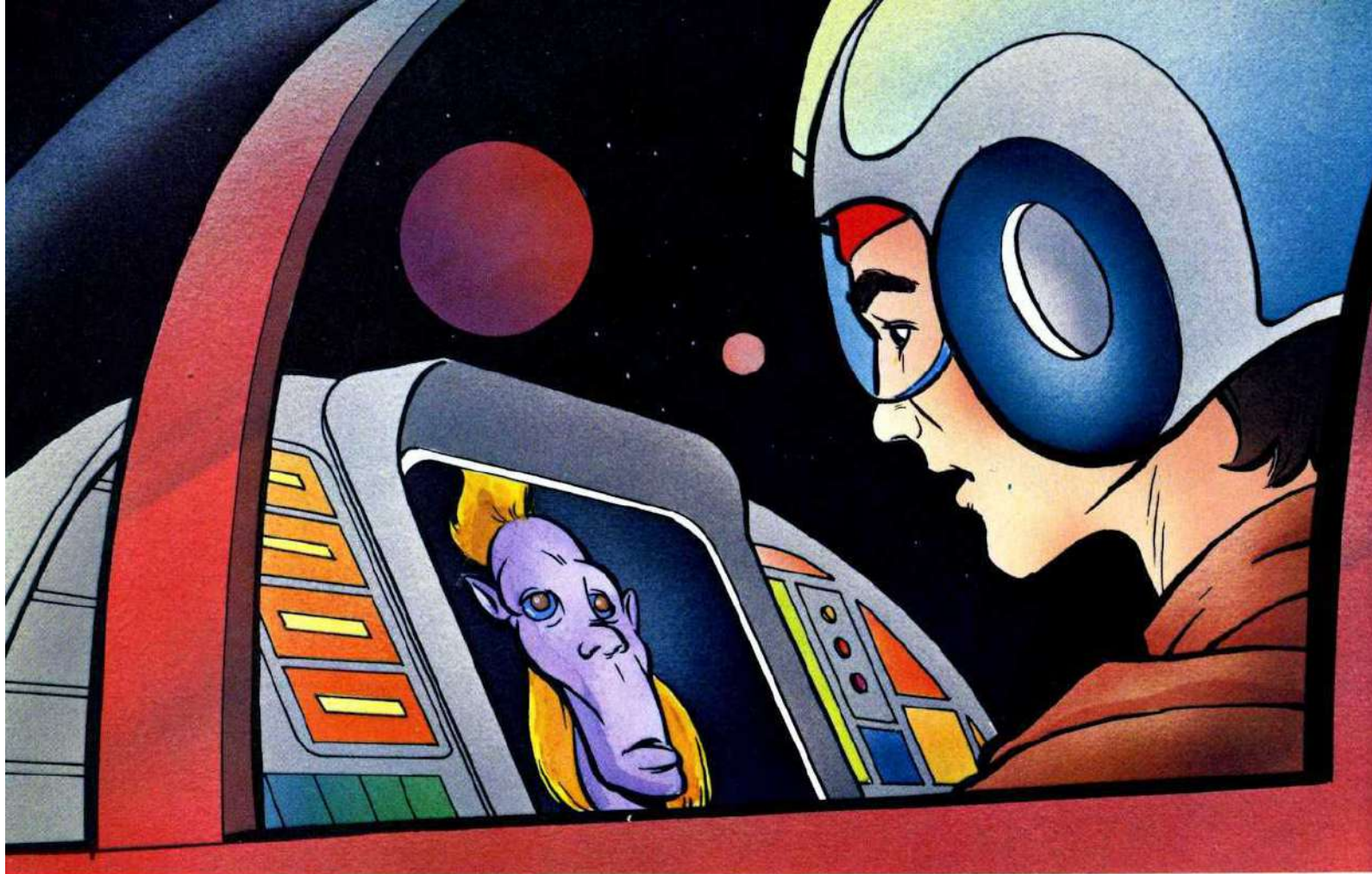
Threepio edged over to the communicator and pressed the “on” button. “Master Jann,” he whispered, “we’ve been board—” But he could not finish. He slumped to the floor as a surge of electricity from a pirate weapon scrambled his circuits. Artoo was next. The little droid spun around and around, blue streaks of electricity wriggling all over him. Then he fell over.

Kybo spoke to Jann through the communicator: “I believe you wish to surrender, human!” He knew Jann could see just what was happening to his friends.

“All right,” Jann responded. “Just don’t harm them!”

“Jann, run!” screamed Jess. “Save yourself!”

Kybo fired a charge into the communicator, and it went dead.



Jann felt his fighter being pulled toward the *Dianoga* by a powerful tractor beam. Quickly he pushed some buttons on his control panel. On the viewing screen appeared the image of his friend Mon Julpa, king of Tammuz-An.

"Kybo Ren's got Jess's transporter, Julpa," said Jann, "and I'm hooked to a tractor beam. Do you know if the fuel got through yet?"

"I have had no word yet, Jann," said the king. "I wish I could help you, but we can do nothing without that fuel."

"We knew the risks before we accepted the mission. Good-bye, old friend. Wish us luck." Jann shut down the communicator.

With the transporter still attached, and Jann's fighter in tow, the *Dianoga* changed course and headed for its home planet, Tarnoonga. Gray and cold and completely covered by one huge ocean, Tarnoonga was a grim, forbidding place. Here and there, lifeless rocks jutted up out of the water. That was all.

As the *Dianoga* started to land, the two droids, propped up in the corner, came back to life. "Artoo!" said Threepio. "Thank goodness you're all right!"

Artoo beeped weakly but bravely.

The *Dianoga* seemed to be heading straight for the face of a rock mountain that rose up out of the water. But at the last moment a passageway, hidden deep in shadow, became visible in the rock face, and the ship passed through it. This was the secret entrance to Kybo Ren's hidden lair. As soon as they entered the cavernous hideaway, Jess's transporter and Jann's fighter were deposited on a large, high platform, and Jess was hustled away under guard.

Threepio hurried over to Jann, who was still climbing out of his fighter. "Oh, master, I'm so glad you're safe. If I can call being in Kybo Ren's secret hideout safe," he added.

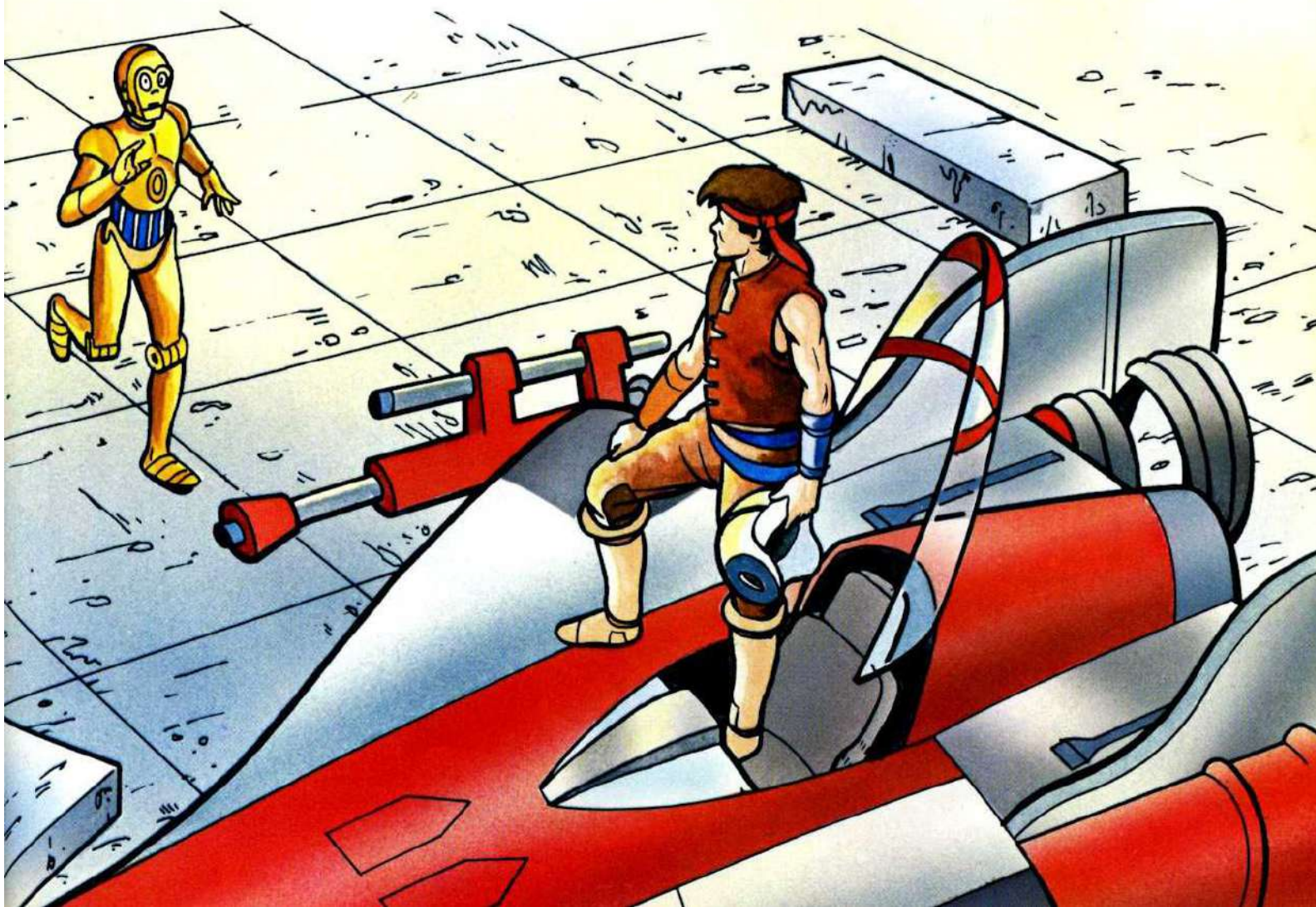
"I'm glad to see you, too, Threepio," said Jann. He looked about the cavern quickly. Everywhere, pirates were getting their fighters ready for action—loading supplies, checking systems, adjusting equipment. "Looks like they're gearing up for something big, Threepio," he said.

"Like an invasion, sir?"

"I'm afraid so," began Jann. But he stopped speaking when a hulking pirate appeared behind them.

"Gorple zo-zo!" growled the pirate, prodding them into movement.

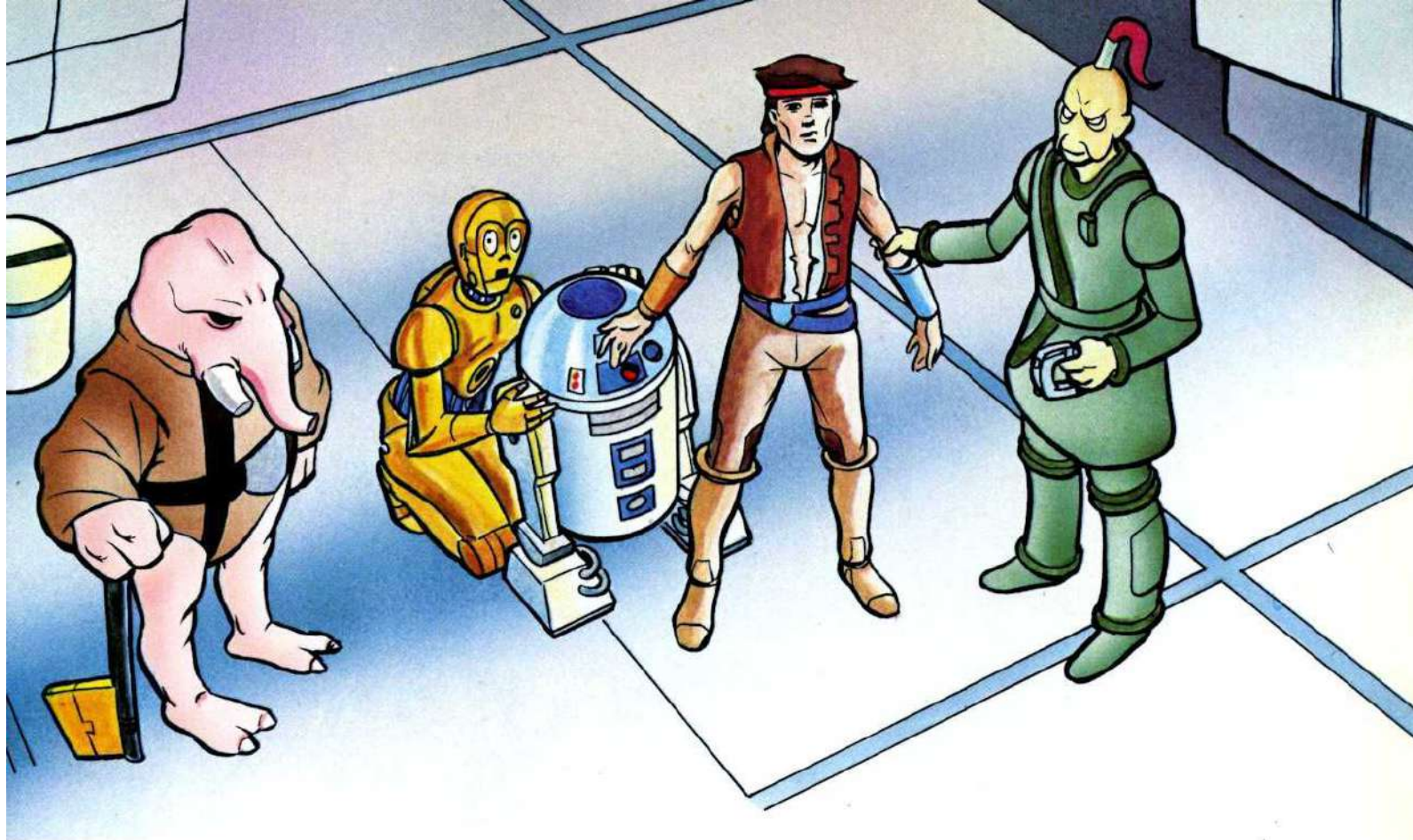
"Such *language*!" said Threepio, who understood six million of them.



The pirate pushed them along damp tunnels and waterways until they reached a large, dark cavern lit by torches. This was the court of Kybo Ren.

In the center of the cavern sat the pirate captain on his great golden throne. Beside him, chained to another throne, sat Jess, scowling angrily. A large, forbidding alien loomed over her. This was Jyn Obah, Kybo's first mate.





Kybo's expression was smug when Jann and the droids were led before him. "Tell me," he said with a snicker, "did you really think I would let your fuel transporter slip by?"

"Your spies have done their work, Kybo," said Jann with a resigned shrug. "I guess we can't fool *you*."

"No, you can't fool me," agreed Kybo. "And now I have you, and Julpa has nothing!" He laughed heartily.

Threepio glanced nervously at Kybo. *I hope we really have fooled him*, he thought. Threepio knew that they were in hot water if the fuel didn't get through to Julpa, and it would be hotter still if Kybo thought of looking inside Jess's fuel transporter. If the pirate found out that it was empty, the game would be up.

"I know there is not enough fuel on Tammuz-An for a single fighter," Kybo crowed. "They are ripe for an attack!"

"Try it!" said Jann.

"I intend to. Very soon." The pirates roared.

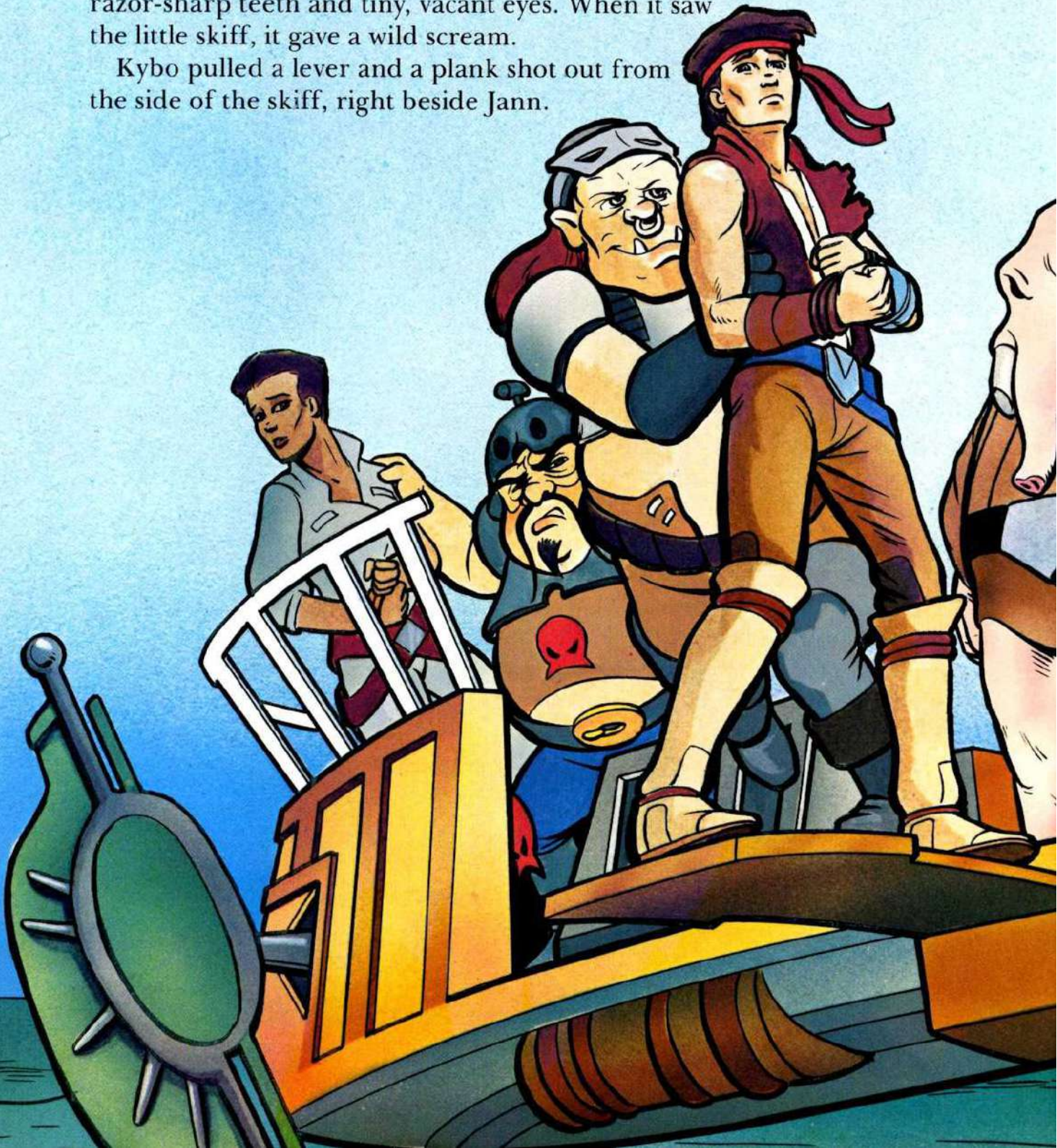
"Silence!" shouted Kybo Ren. "Take them away." He looked straight at Jann. "You will die tomorrow!"

Jess and Jann exchanged uneasy glances. They had done all they could to help King Julpa. Now they needed *his* help. Had the fuel reached Tammuz-An? Would Julpa reach them in time?

The next day dawned bright and clear over the endless waters of Tarnoonga. A small skiff hovered over the sea, piloted by Kybo. On deck stood Jann, his wrists bound, and three burly pirates. Jann was to be thrown to a hideous sea monster called a miridon. Jess and the droids were in the skiff too. Kybo had brought them along to watch Jann die.

Suddenly the water in the distance exploded, and the dreadful miridon broke the surface. It was hideous indeed, with several rows of razor-sharp teeth and tiny, vacant eyes. When it saw the little skiff, it gave a wild scream.

Kybo pulled a lever and a plank shot out from the side of the skiff, right beside Jann.



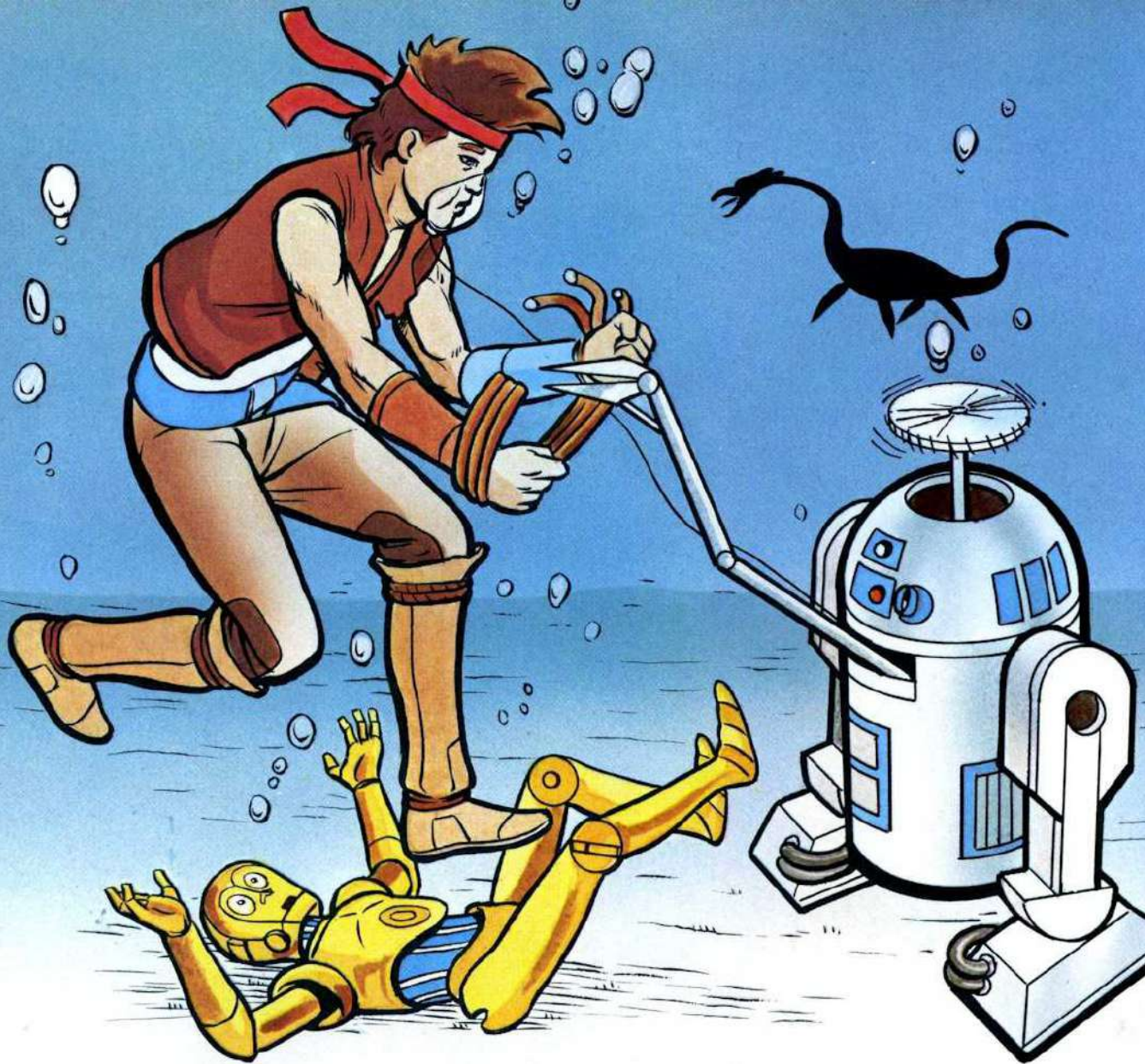
"Jann!" screamed Jess, struggling to get free.

"Don't worry, Jess. Maybe it's not hungry," said Jann.

"You have courage," said Kybo. "I like that. But . . ." He shrugged and Jyn pushed Jann onto the plank. Then he flipped the lever. The plank dropped out from under Jann's feet, and he disappeared into the water.

"Artoo, do something!" Threepio cried frantically.





Artoo did something. He butted Threepio over the side of the skiff and then charged after him, breaking the railing. The pirates rushed to the side, but they were too late.

"Forget about them," said Kybo with a wave of the hand. "They are doomed." As Jess stared at the water in stunned silence, the skiff turned back toward Kybo's hideaway.

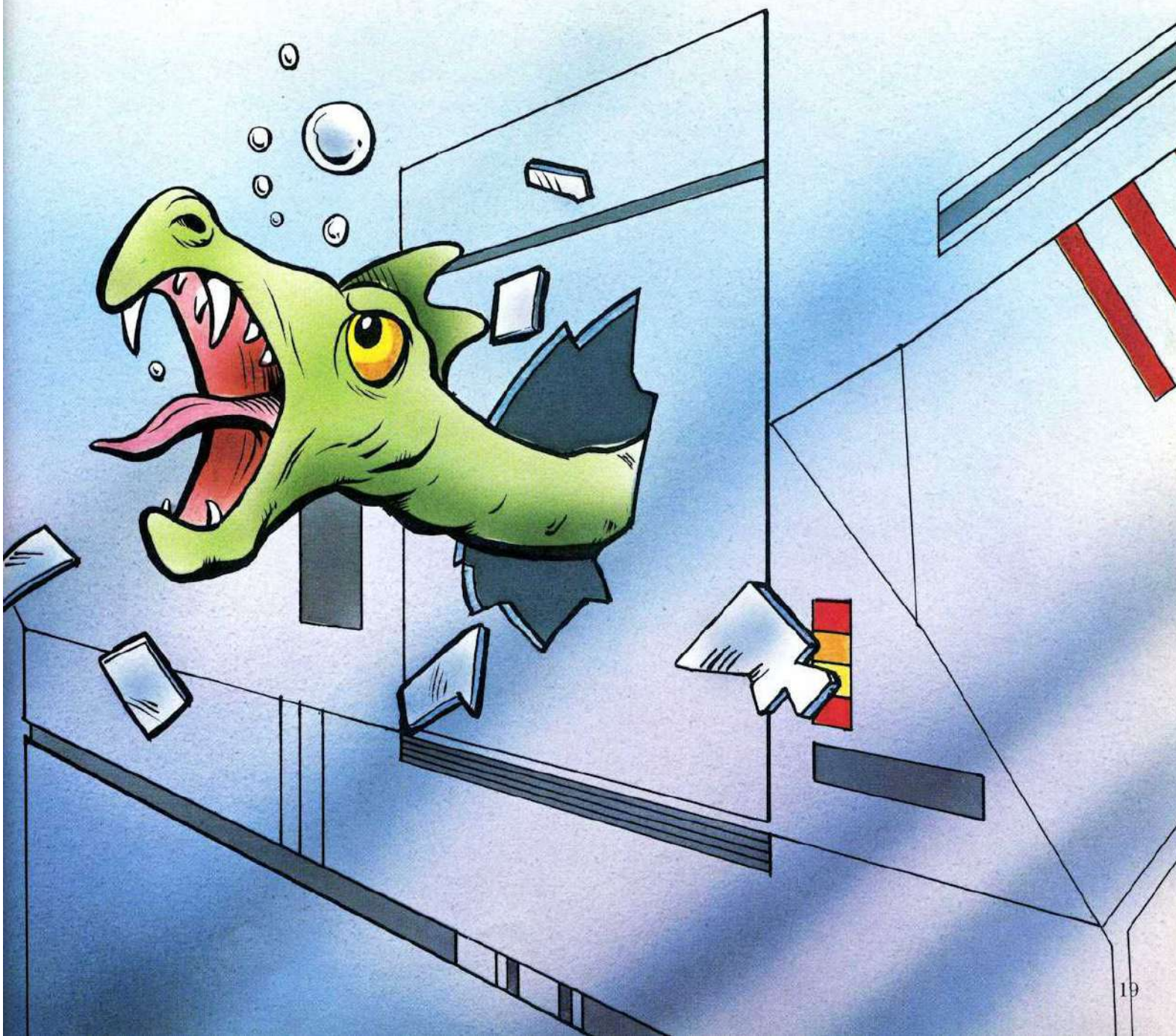
Below the surface of the water, it seemed that Kybo's words might be true. Threepio had sunk like a stone. Jann struggled desperately with his bonds while Artoo moved closer to him, using a little propeller on top of his dome. A panel opened in Artoo's side, and a small breather mask popped out. Jann gulped the air gratefully as Artoo cut him free.

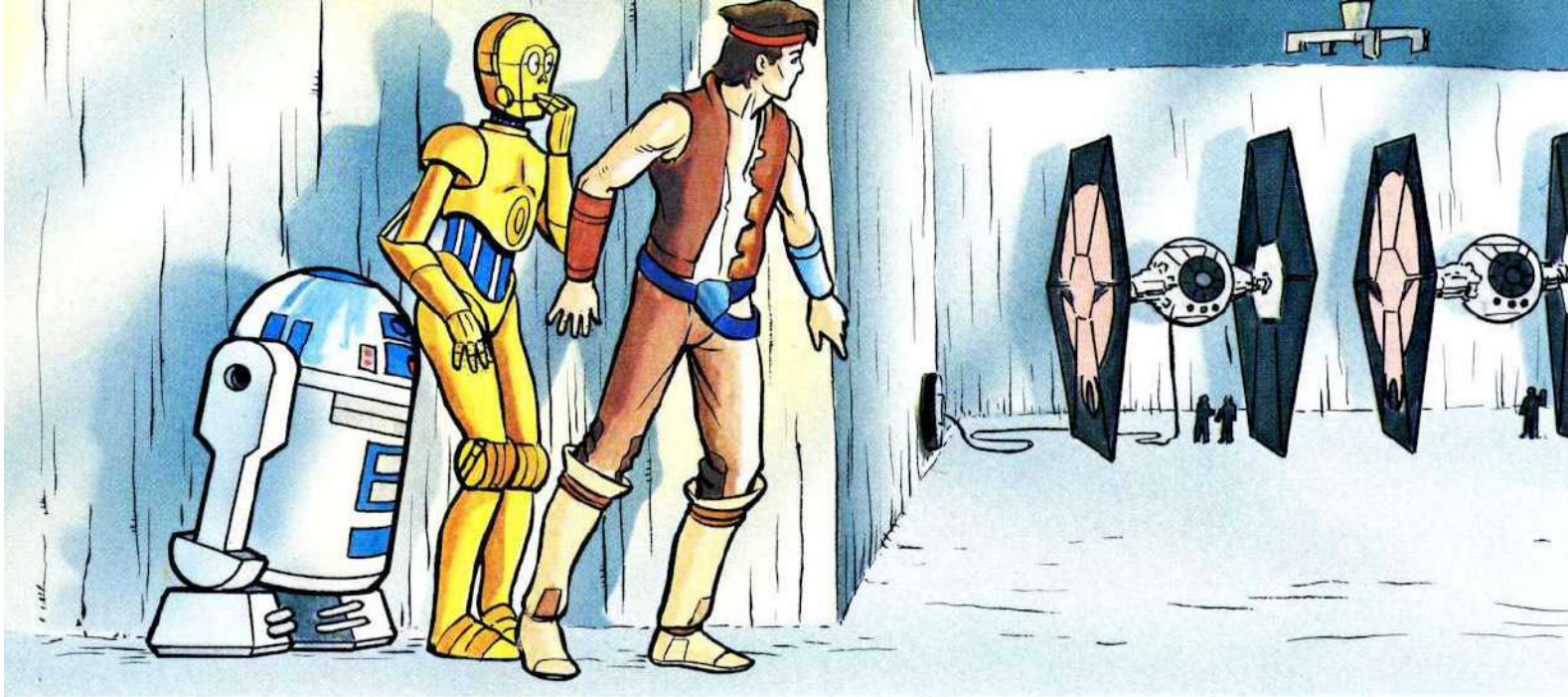
Suddenly a huge shadow fell across them all. Artoo grabbed Jann and Threepio and whisked them away—just in time. The rampaging miridon barged past as the three friends huddled together on a seaweed-covered ledge.

Jann tapped the two droids and pointed to the wreck of an old freighter on the ocean bottom nearby. They began swimming for all they were worth. It was their only hope.

The sea began to rumble again as the miridon turned and headed right for them. Artoo's little propeller was working at double speed. At last they reached the door of the wreck and darted inside. *Crash!* The miridon barreled in right behind them. They swam toward the front of the ship, inches ahead of its mighty jaws.

Then the miridon roared with frustration. It was stuck fast, wedged into the doorway. As if realizing that it wasn't going anywhere for a long time, it bellowed in rage as Jann and the droids swam up to the surface.





The pirate cavern was quiet as the three friends sneaked in through an underwater entrance. The first thing they saw was a fleet of fighter planes, lined up in a row.

"Looks like they're ready to launch the attack on Tammuz-An," said Jann.

"Oh, where is King Julpa?" whispered Threepio.

"If the fuel gets through, you know he'll be here," said Jann.

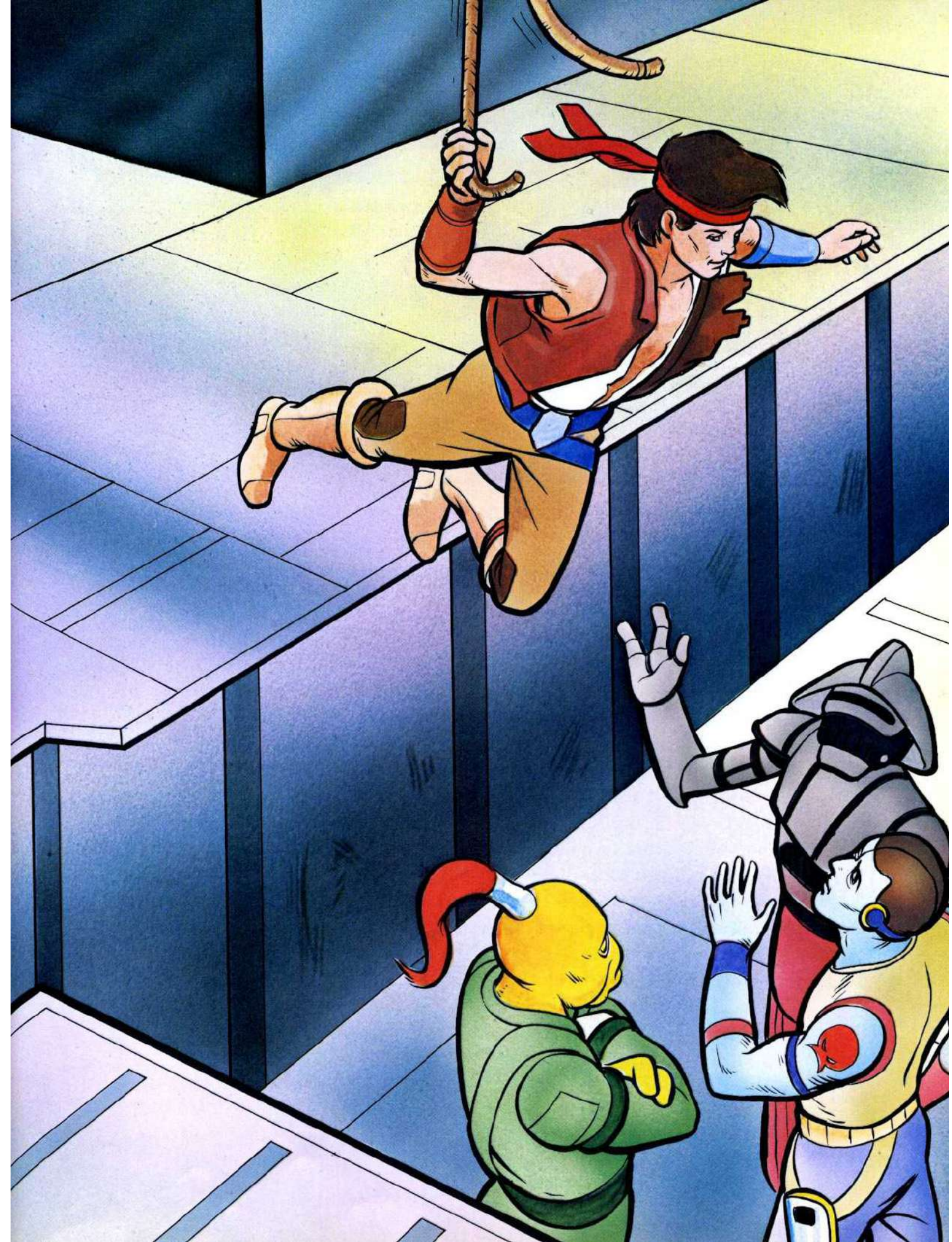
"Meantime, we have to find Jess and try to get away. Let's split up and look for her."

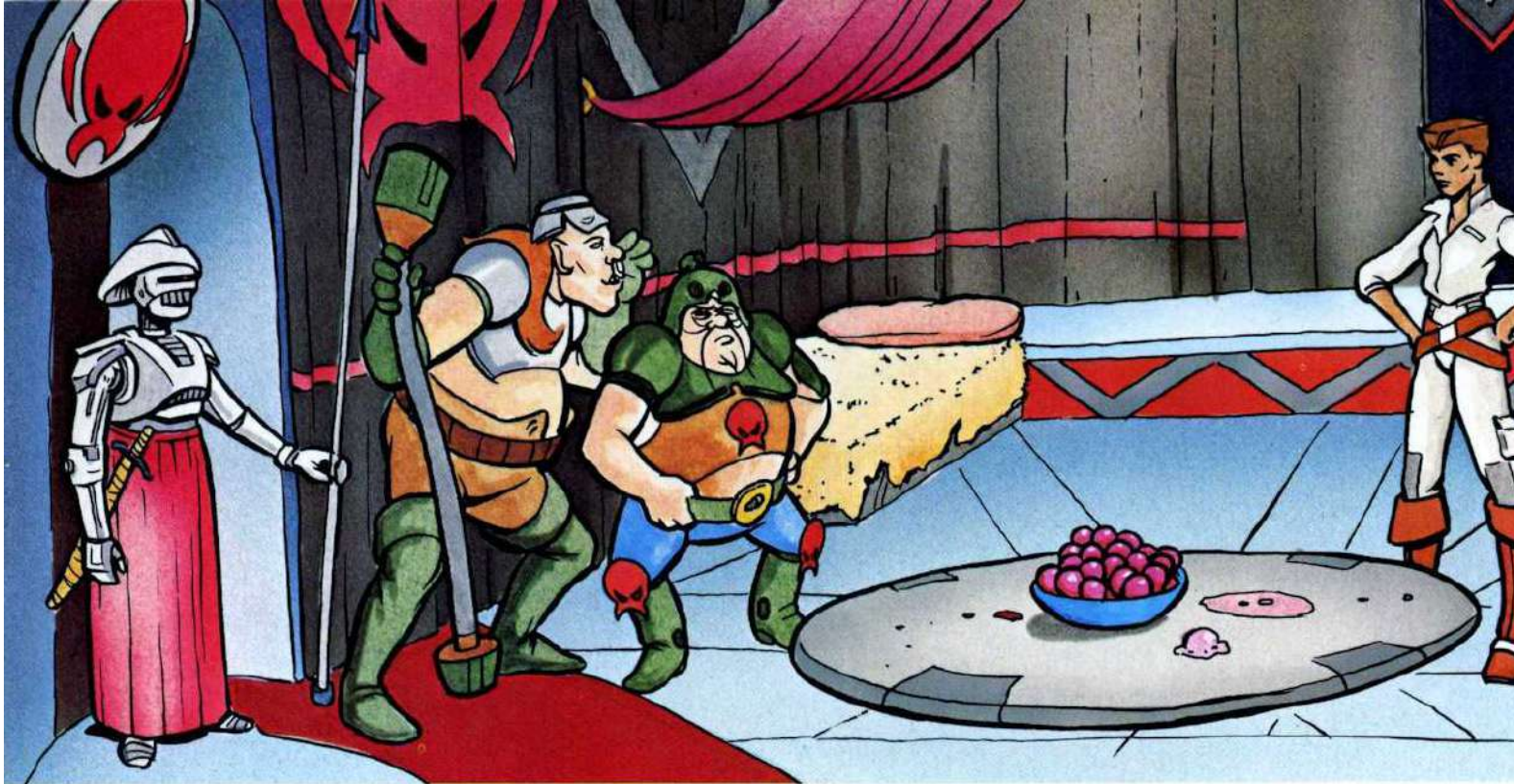
Threepio hurried down the corridor toward the sleeping quarters on tiptoe. He looked into each chamber. No, not in this one. Not there, either. Wait a minute! In the next chamber a figure with short, cropped brown hair was sleeping under a dirty blanket. Jess! Threepio moved quietly toward her. Hesitantly he gave her a little poke. "Mistress Jess!" he whispered.

Aagh! It wasn't Jess at all, but a horrible-looking, brown-haired, toothless pirate, who woke up with a roar. Threepio backed out of the room, but it was too late. Two other pirates had awakened also and were moving toward him with droid-murder in their eyes.

"Master Jann!" yelled Threepio. "Help!" He skittered out into the corridor, praying that Jann would appear in time.

"*Thank the Maker!*" thought Threepio. There was Jann! With a wild battle cry, he swooped down from a balcony above the corridor on a long cable. "Duck, Threepio!" he yelled. With perfect timing, Artoo rolled in and knocked Threepio aside just as Jann crashed into all three pirates and toppled them like bowling pins. "We'd better get out of here!" said Jann. He and the droids took off, with half of Kybo's bloodthirsty crew in pursuit.





In another part of Kybo's hideaway, Jess was having her own troubles. She was locked into Kybo's private quarters, and, unfortunately, he was there with her.

"You've got such spirit, such fire," he said to her. "With the spoils from Tammuz-An, I will buy you kingdoms!"

Jess backed away in disgust. "Forget it, Kybo!" she spat at him. "You don't have the power to hold Tammuz-An!"

"We'll see about that," he laughed. "I cannot lose." He puffed out his chest like a rooster. "No one escapes the wrath of—"

Jyn Obah, the first mate, rushed into the room and whispered something into Kybo's ear before he could finish his boast.

Kybo stopped smiling. "Jyn tells me that your friend has escaped destruction," he said. "Now I will succeed where the miridon has failed." He turned to leave. "Watch the girl, Jyn," he ordered.

Jess smiled as a wave of relief swept over her. Jann was all right! Now she was more determined than ever to escape that space-slug Kybo! Her mind raced as she eyed Jyn warily.

On the floor was a long, narrow carpet. It ended near the door, and Jyn was standing on that end. It gave Jess an idea.

"You know," she said, "Jann is going to blow this whole mountain sky-high. He has enough explosives on his fighter to do it."

"You lie," said Jyn.

"You think so?" she said. "I just heard the first explosions. He's starting down at the loading bays. If you don't believe me, look down the hall. You'll see."

Jyn leaned out the door to look, and Jess swiftly bent down, grabbed her end of the carpet, and yanked hard. Jyn went down in the doorway with a surprised grunt.

Like a shot, Jess leaped to the door control panel and hit it. The door slid closed, pinning Jyn. All Jess had to do was hop lightly over the struggling pirate. "Ladies first," she said. Then she sprinted out to look for Jann.

At that moment Jann was crouched behind a crate in the cargo area, catching his breath. Artoo and Threepio were with him. "Looks like we've given everyone the slip," Jann said, panting.

"Not everyone," said a sinister voice.

They spun around to find Kybo, pointing a laser at them.

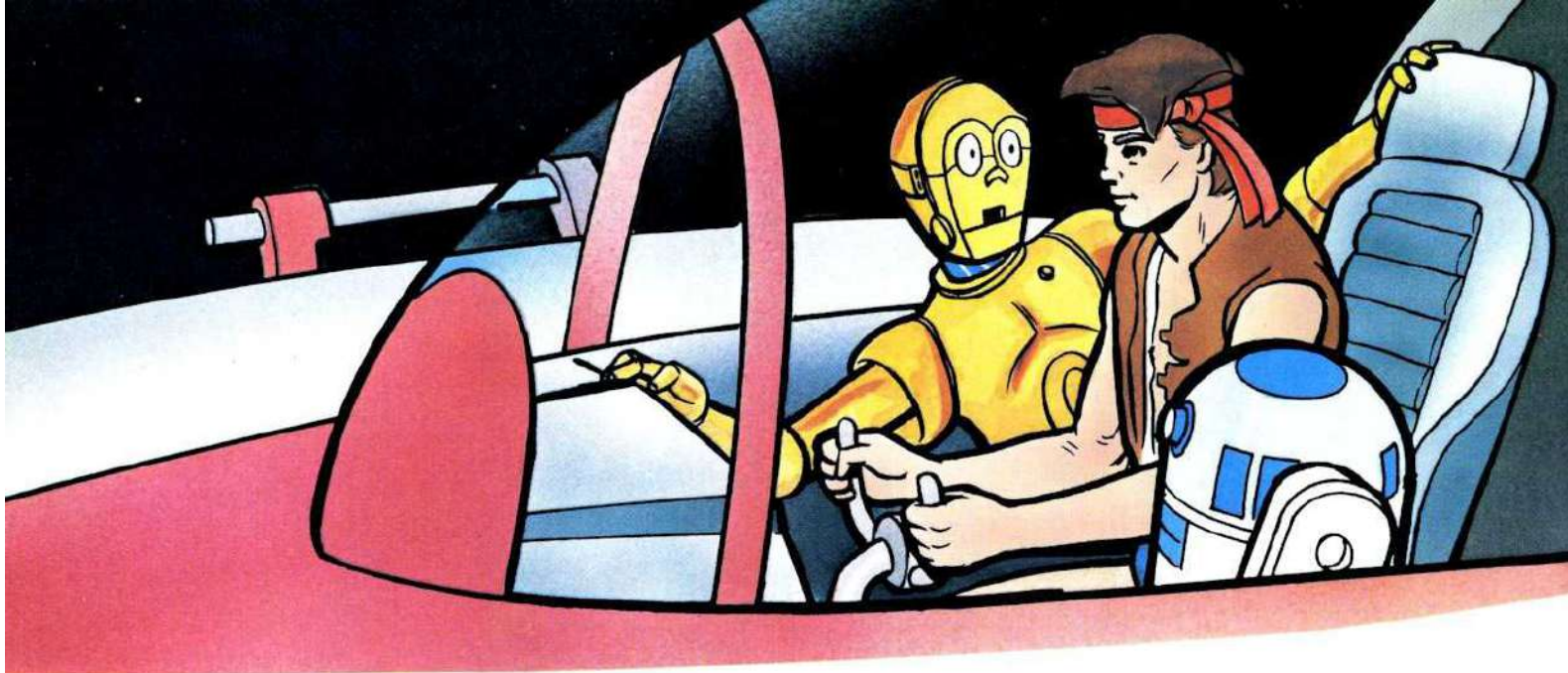
A look of panic passed over Jann's face, and he and Threepio threw themselves onto the ground at Kybo's feet.

"I'm surprised," Kybo said with a sneer. "I thought you'd take this like a man, Tosh. So you admit now that you cannot escape the wrath of—" *Oooff!* Kybo was hit from behind by a heavy net full of cargo, and he landed headfirst in a storage barrel.

Jann and Threepio stood up, brushing themselves off. "Thanks, Jess," said Jann, waving up to where she sat at the controls of a cargo boom. "We were just on our way to rescue *you!*"

"Sorry," she called cheerfully, "but I couldn't wait. Let's go!"





Kybo struggled out of the barrel. "Stop them!" he cried to his pirates as Jann and Jess and the droids ran toward the hangar area. "No, don't shoot, you fools!" he screamed. "*Hit the fuel tanker and this whole place will go up!* To your battle stations—we attack Tammuz-An, *now!*"

Jann sprinted toward his A-wing fighter. "Once I draw them off, get the fuel transporter and hightail it out of here!"

Jess smiled. "Good luck," she said.

Jann pulled Artoo and Threepio into the small cockpit with him and gunned the engines. In seconds he was racing out of the mountain. The *Dianoga* was right behind him.

"The longer Kybo's men stay after us," said Jann, "the better chance Jess has of getting to Julpa."

Threepio glanced behind them. "Well, they're all after us, sir. And the *Dianoga* is awfully close."

Jann felt a familiar tug. "Here we go again," he said. "It's got us in the tractor beam." The A-wing was pulled toward a large open hatchway in the *Dianoga*. As the A-wing disappeared inside, the hatch closed with an echoing boom.

Kybo and Jyn were there to greet them when they climbed out. "Welcome aboard," said Kybo. "I'm glad you will be with me when I make Tammuz-An mine."

"Oh, master," Threepio moaned softly. "What if the fuel shipment never got through?"

"I don't know," replied Jann, shaking his head. "I just don't know."

"You two droids, come with me," growled one of the guards. "You're going to work in the torpedo room."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear," said Threepio as they were marched off.

Now Jann was alone with Kybo. The pirate was in a triumphant mood. "What a foolish young man you are, Jann Tosh," he cackled. "You thought you could escape me yet again, but of course you could not. And now I am going to be master of the galaxies, and you and your friends will be space dust."

"You're heading for a fall, Kybo," said Jann calmly. "It's going to take a lot more than a two-bit pirate from a nowhere planet to harm King Julpa!"

Part of Jann believed this, but part of him was very worried. He didn't even know the fate of the fuel-loaded skybus, let alone whether Jess had escaped in one piece. And he wasn't in such a good place either.

Threepio and Artoo were at work in the torpedo room, under the three watchful eyes of a dagger-shaped pirate droid. Artoo was loading a torpedo into the chamber as Threepio held the door open.

"Moments ago we were on our way to join King Julpa," said Threepio sadly, "and now we're loading the arms that will be used against him."

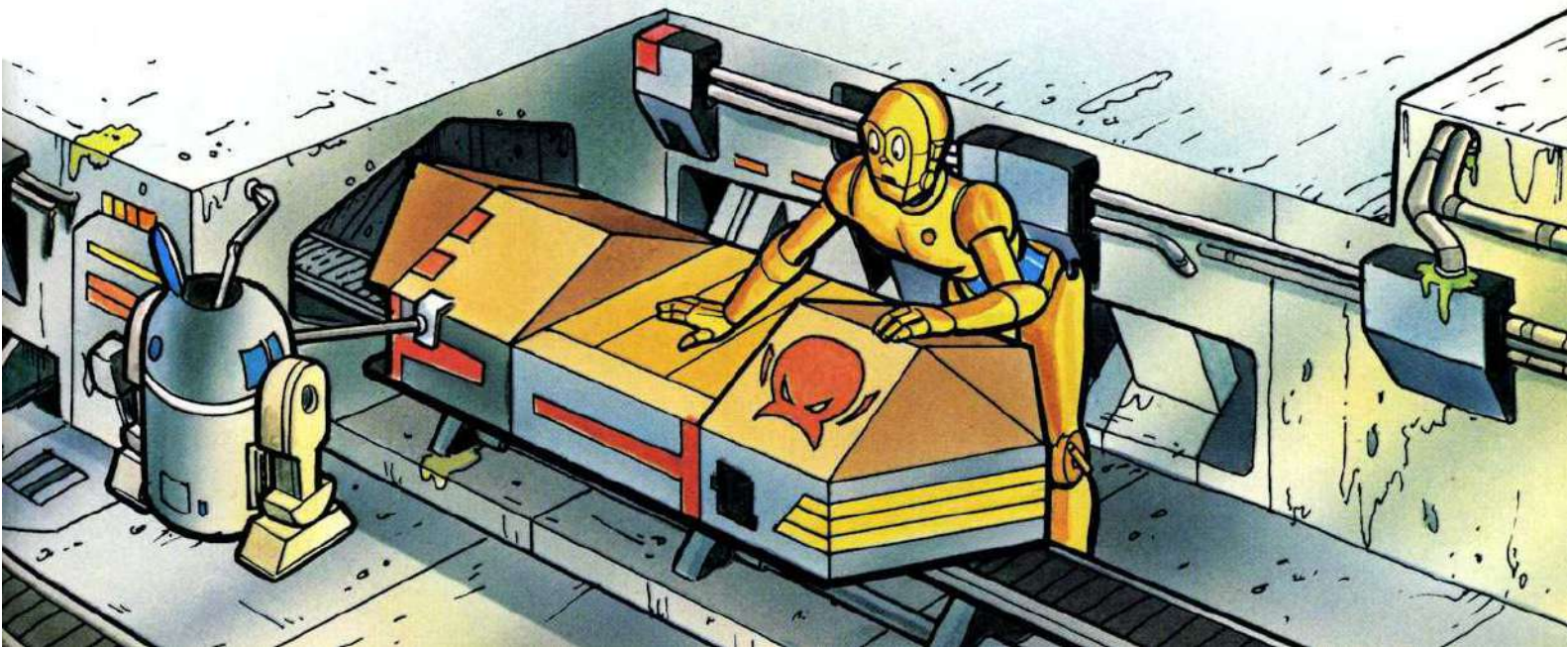
The pirate droid moved away to check his bank of dials and switches. In a flash Artoo reversed the torpedo and loaded it into its chamber backward.

"Artoo," scolded Threepio, "don't you see what you just did? That torpedo will backfire and destroy—" He stopped as he realized just what Artoo was doing. "The whole ship!"

Artoo whistled happily.

Threepio thought about this. "It can't be as good a plan as it sounds. . . . Wait, I've figured out what the problem is: We're *on* the ship, Artoo!"

The little droid beeped and clicked.



"Yes, well, how are we going to 'find Master Jann and escape'? Have you forgotten about *him*?" Threepio pointed at the pirate droid.

"Eeeep," said Artoo. He certainly hadn't. He reached out his probe and pushed a button, and the pirate droid was snatched up by the mechanical claw that loaded torpedoes into the launcher. The droid was stuffed into the chamber, and Threepio quickly closed the door behind it.

"I bet you think you're very clever," said Threepio. Artoo agreed.

Threepio and Artoo hurried out of the torpedo room and down the dark corridors to look for Jann. But they hadn't gotten far when Threepio was jumped from behind. "Don't shoot! We surrender!" cried Threepio.

"Threepio! Artoo!" It was Jann, and he was as surprised as they were. "How did you get—"

"*Attention!*" came a voice over the loudspeaker. "*Tammuzanian fuel transporter in Sector Eight. Prepare laser cannons!*"

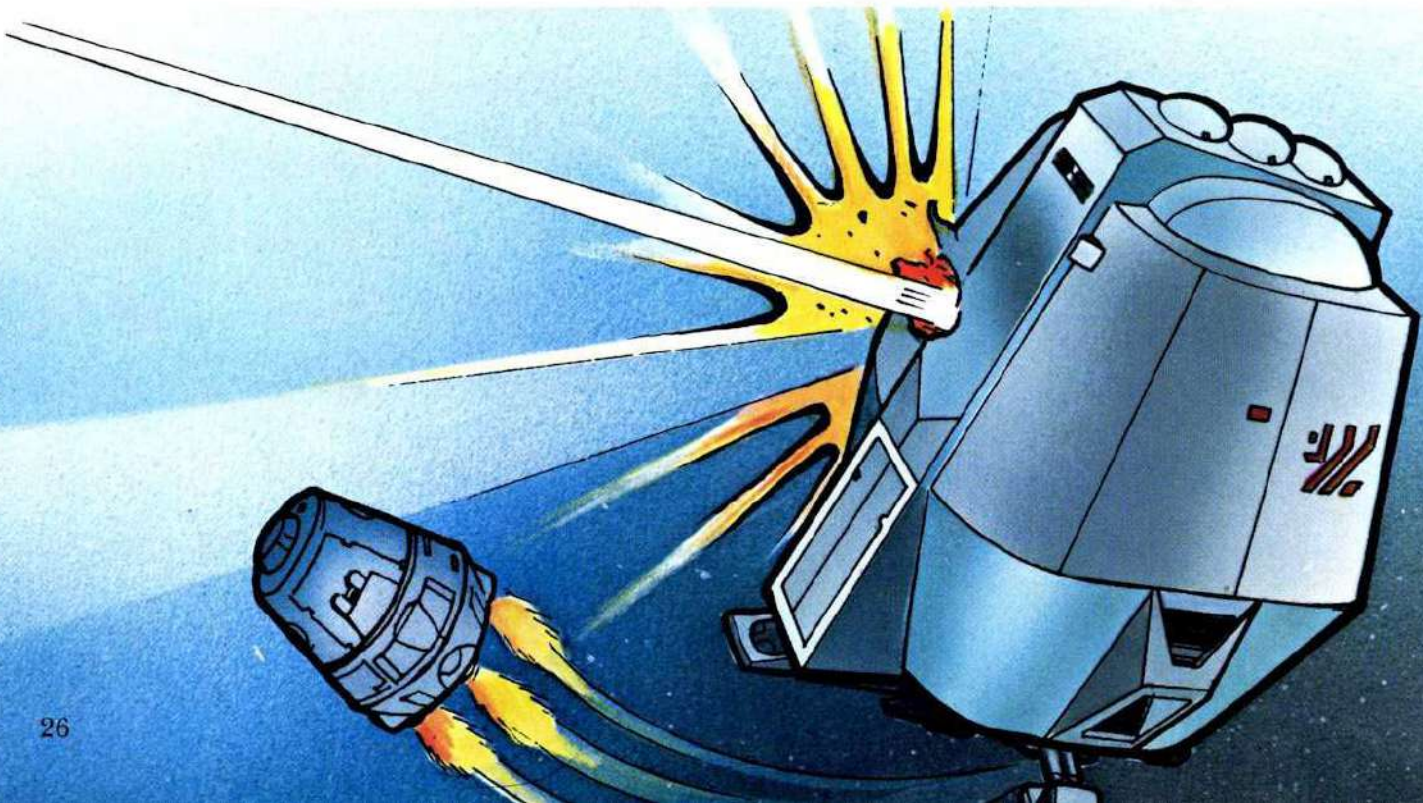
"It's Jess!" said Jann. "Quick, do what you can in the engine room to stop them. I'll take the bridge. Hurry!"

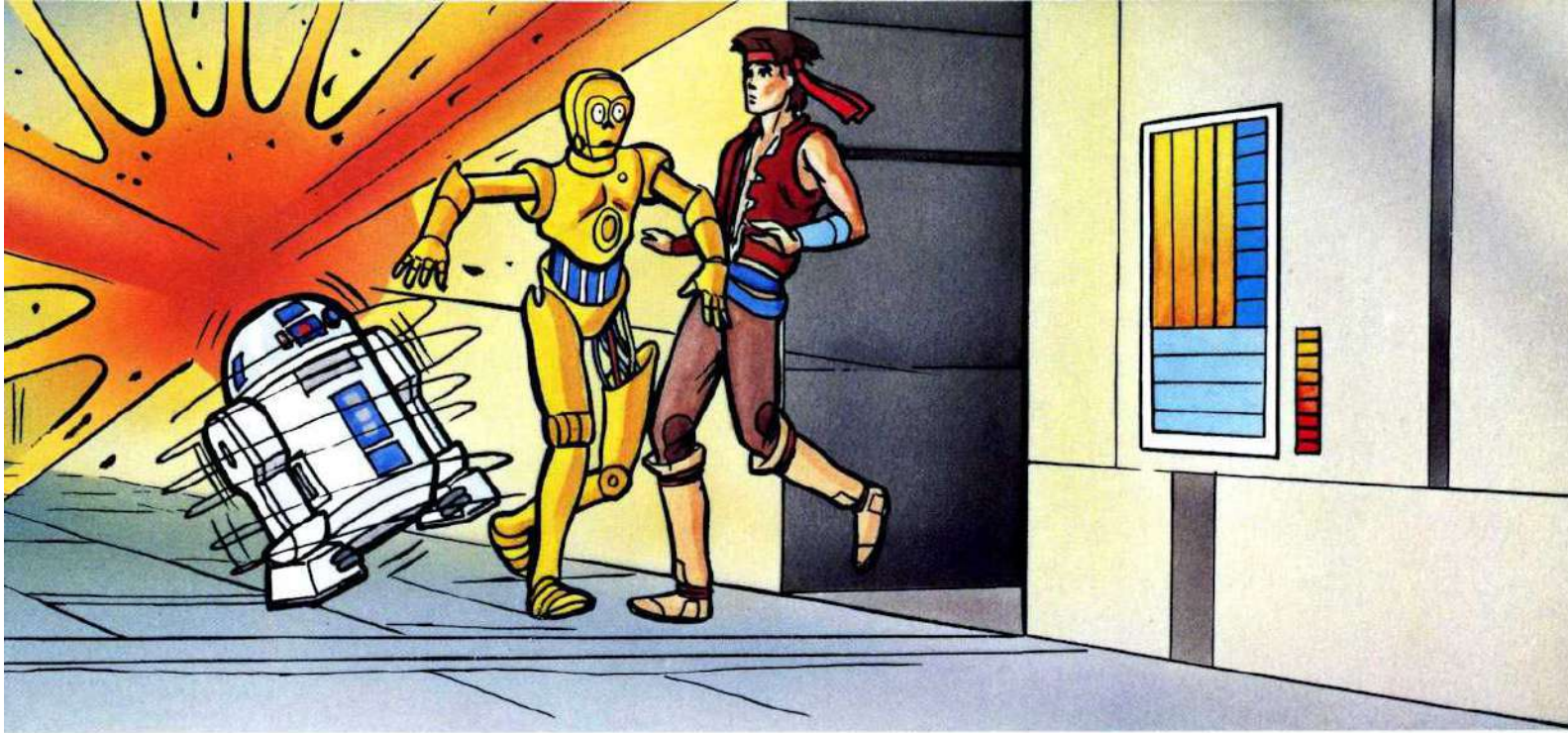
On the bridge Kybo was looking through the crosshairs of the laser cannon. "One shot"—he was gloating—"and that fuel will explode like a supernova. A little closer . . . right about . . ."

"No!" yelled Jann, bursting in.

"Now!" Kybo fired.

An intense laser blast streaked from the huge guns and ripped the transporter in two. A small shuttle pod could be seen ejecting from the transporter. Jann cheered inwardly. Jess was safe!





"What?" Kybo stared at the tanker in disbelief. "The transporter didn't explode! It's *empty*! There's no fuel in the tank!"

"There never was," said Jann. "*We were the decoy*, Kybo. By attacking us, you let the real fuel transporter get through."

A pirate voice came through the speaker. "A-wings approaching—maximum speed!"

For the first time Kybo looked worried. It had finally dawned on him that his grand plan might fail.

Jann let out a whoop of joy. Julpa had finally gotten his fuel! The Tammuzanian fighters were coming to the rescue!

"Let them come," snarled Kybo, his finger moving toward the laser cannon again.

Meanwhile, the two droids were in the engine room, pushing buttons, flicking switches, and turning dials. "Oh, hurry, Artoo!" urged Threepio. "How long can it take to sabotage this ship?" There was a muffled explosion from outside the engine room. "Not too long, it seems," he said with great relief.

"Alert! Alert! Torpedoes backfiring!" said the loudspeaker. "All systems are jammed!"

Artoo and Threepio ran for their lives as Kybo's ship began to self-destruct all around them. An explosion caught them from behind. Stunned, Artoo spun around in crazy circles. Threepio's left leg was hit and came loose so that it dangled by just a few wires.

"We must keep moving!" cried Threepio, lurching along. "Try to keep your circuits straight!" They ran into Jann just as they reached the A-wing.

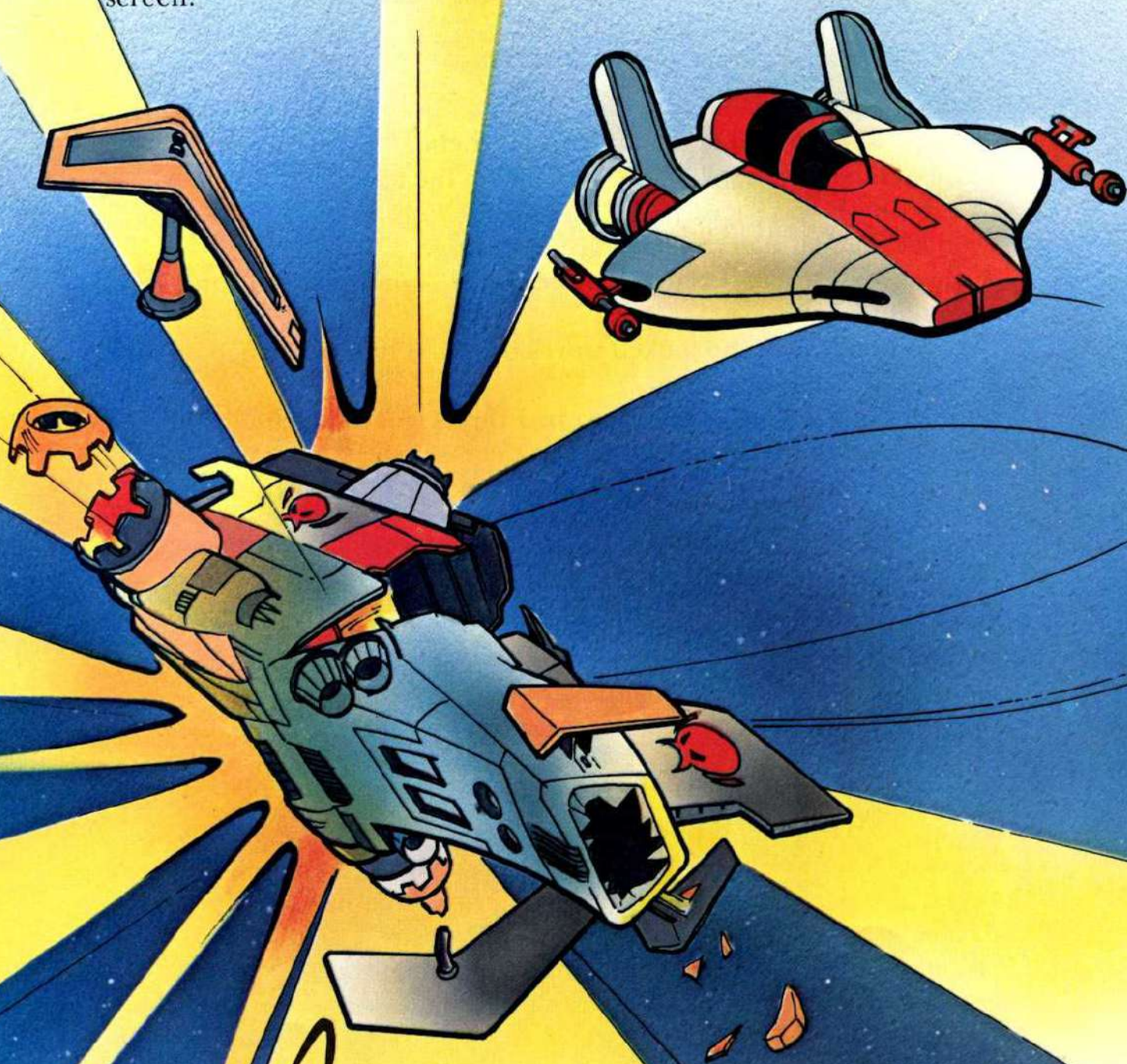
"Are you all right?" he asked.

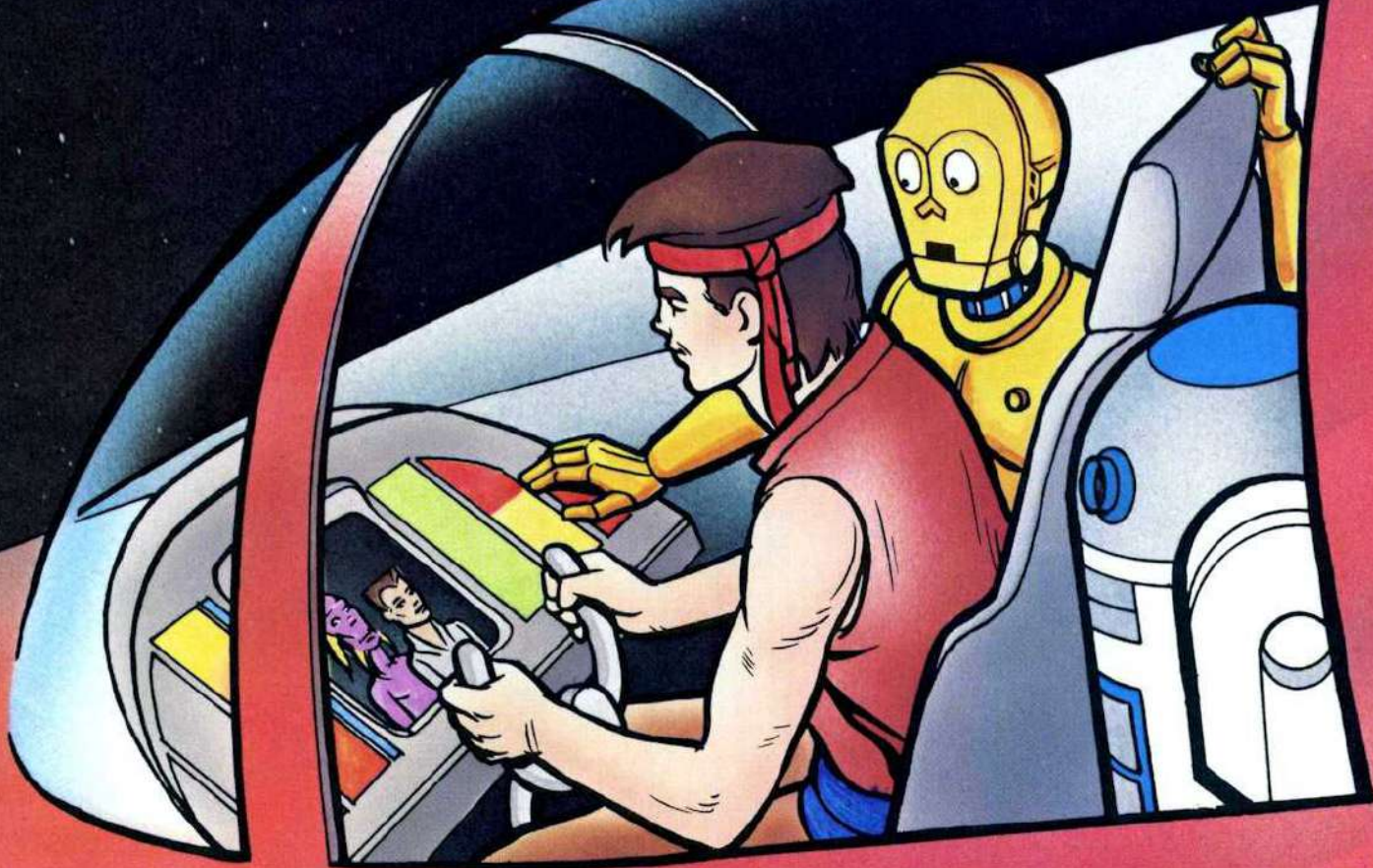
"Don't worry about us, sir," said Threepio. "Every system is running amok. We'll be lucky to get the bay doors open!"

Jann clambered into the A-wing, dragging the dented, twisted droids in behind him. He gunned the engines. "Hang on!" he said.

A moment later the A-wing crashed through the bay doors of the *Dianoga*. A huge explosion ripped through the ship just as they were pulling clear.

Jann flicked a few switches, and King Julpa and Jess appeared on the screen.





"Jess, thank heaven you're okay! Did you see it, you two?" cried Jann. "They did it! Threepio and Artoo wrecked the *Dianoga*!"

"Indeed I did see it," said Julpa. "Congratulations! You were the best decoys I've ever seen."

"Kybo never dreamed he had captured an empty transporter," said Jess. "He was so arrogant, he never even thought to look inside it! His overconfidence was his downfall."

"Well then, Artoo," said Threepio loftily, "let this be a lesson to you. Never be too sure of an easy victory."

Artoo made a rude noise. Threepio turned away haughtily and his left leg fell off with a thunk.

"Never be too sure of anything, Threepio," said Jann, laughing. "Now let's go home and get you two heroes repaired!"





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